9:Skinner E-5 (1955-1957)1960 FA28 Mossi FA28

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643 the sons of the ruling family, the *nakomcse*, formed a noble class, above
565 classes of commoners, serfs, and slaves. Classed among the commoners in many villages were the descendants of former district chiefs who had been deposed by the Moro Nabas. The reason that the rulers gave for the deposal of district chiefs was always disloyalty; but everyone recognized that this was an excuse whereby the reigning sublineage deposed older branches and provided positions for its cadet or collateral branches.

631 The governing hierarchy of the Mossi was a lineage with its com-
613 ponent minor and minimal branches. Like most lineages, this ruling lineage possessed an ideology that all of its members had equal access to its corporate assets. The most important asset of this lineage was, of course, its sovereignty, its right to rule. The *nam* is the symbol of Mossi sovereignty and is described by them as "that force of God which enables a mere man to rule over other men." The *nam* was the possession of Wedraogo, the group's founder, and of Moro Naba Wubri, the first ruler of Wagadougou, and this possession became the patrimony of all their descendants. This being the case, the ruling chief of any village, district, principality, or kingdom did not own the *nam* of that area; he was considered the temporary holder of it, and on his death it reverted to the collective descendants of the royal ancestors.
[428 A man did not have the right to pass the *nam* on to any person because
421 it was not his. Whenever a Mossi chief was being considered for office his commoner electors asked him the following questions: "Before his death, did Naba X designate anyone to replace him as chief?" This question was asked three times, and the candidate responded three times: "No! The Naba did not designate anyone. You may name anyone you wish; even if he is a blind man or a leper."

In actuality, this vaunted equality of access to the *nam* by all members of the ruling lineage was a legal fiction. And despite the fact that all the nobles declared that they could go to Wagadougou to seek the *nam* whenever a chief died, in reality only the members of the dead chief's minimal lineage (often the descendants of his grandfather) presented themselves as candidates. Indeed, of all the candidates, the eldest son of the dead ruler was the one most often chosen to be